



Submission by

**Crime Stoppers South Australia**

to the

**Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence**

## Executive Summary

Crime Stoppers South Australia (CSSA) recognises that domestic and family violence remains a significant challenge within the South Australian community. Addressing this complex issue requires coordinated efforts from government, police and community leaders, and this submission outlines the expanded role that CSSA can play within a whole-of-community approach.

As a not-for-profit organisation, CSSA is committed to:

- Raising public awareness and driving community involvement in crime-related matters;
- Encouraging the community to share information on unsolved crimes and suspicious activities, with the option to report anonymously.

CSSA has an acute understanding of how valuable bystander information is in both preventing and solving crimes, including domestic and family violence.

There are multiple investigative and intelligence benefits from third-party bystander information. Not only does it assist police in solving already-committed crimes and identifying suspects, it also acts as a deterrent, given that South Australia's population of 1.8 million can serve as an effective crime prevention tool by being watchful eyes and ears for suspected domestic and family violence behaviours in their social circles, work networks, local communities and neighbourhoods.

The former Chief Coroner of Victoria previously emphasised the potential role of Crime Stoppers in receiving third-party bystander information. It was the coroner's view that family members, friends, neighbours, and colleagues were all well-positioned to provide vital insights that help identify hidden perpetrators and support the prevention of further violence - provided there is a safe and reliable channel for reporting.

Indeed, Recommendation 29 in the Response to Issues Paper from the Coroners Court of Victoria saw the coroner exercise powers pursuant to section 72(2) of the Coroners Act 2008, to recommend Victoria Police and Crime Stoppers conduct a trial extending the *Say Something* campaign to family violence.

While CSSA encourages the public to contact 000 in a life-threatening emergency and 131 444 for police assistance, it does not proactively promote anonymous tips in relation to family and domestic violence matters, on the advice of police.

Notwithstanding that, CSSA does receive information regarding family and domestic violence matters, which confirms that a reporting system currently exists for third-party bystanders to anonymously report non-immediate family violence information.

In addition, CSSA has a standalone web-based reporting portal developed as part of its partnership with the Department of Environment and Water (DEW), which allows the community to share information about a range of wildlife and environmental crimes. That information is then shared with DEW investigators and other law enforcement as needed and can be expanded to include other government agencies, departments and other entities as required.

While there are numerous education and awareness campaigns currently in existence, very few encourage third party bystanders to anonymously report suspected (non-urgent) signs of domestic and family violence.

CSSA promotes proven information collection systems that allow the public to anonymously share what they know, including an online reporting portal which was upgraded in 2016 as a result of State Government funding.

Information anonymously received from the community via Crime Stoppers is assessed and passed through an Information Report process to police for further investigation as required.

These reporting options offer the community a safe and anonymous avenue to share information they may otherwise be reluctant to provide directly to the police due to fear of retaliation from perpetrators and/or concerns about becoming formally involved in police investigations or legal proceedings.

Additionally, CSSA has a long-standing history of working with mainstream and CALD media throughout South Australia. This collaboration helps amplify the reach of crime awareness campaigns beyond the traditional scope of government advertising.

In conclusion, CSSA believes that the current family violence strategy in South Australia can be enhanced by promotion of the crucial role that third-party bystanders can play in preventing and addressing family violence. By fostering an environment where community members feel empowered to report anonymously, CSSA can help build on South Australia's response to domestic and family violence.

## **Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence (DFSV) in South Australia**

DFSV remains a critical issue in South Australia, with particularly concerning trends emerging over recent years. Thousands of South Australians are now affected by domestic and family violence, with women and children typically accepted as being the most vulnerable.

In the 2022-2023 period, [crime statistics datasets](#) managed by the Government of South Australia noted more than 14,600 domestic violence offence incidents. It should be noted that it is widely accepted that many cases go unreported.

Sexual violence, particularly within intimate relationships, saw an increase in South Australia during the pandemic, consistent with broader trends across the country. National data from the [Australian Bureau of Statistics](#) (ABS) indicates that women were eight times more likely than men to experience sexual assault by an intimate partner since the age of 15 (8.4% of women compared with 1.1% of men).

In response, a range of initiatives have been introduced, including the release of the [Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy 2023-2027](#), by the Australian Government – Department of Social Services, which focuses on prevention, protection, and support for those impacted.

A wide network of support services is available to help those directly affected by DFSV. Organisations such as Women’s Safety Services SA and the Victim Support Service offer crisis intervention, counselling and housing support, while initiatives like the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) allow individuals to check whether their partner has a history of violence.

The [expansion of Safety Hubs](#) in regional areas has made accessing help easier for those in rural communities across ten towns within nine government regions. Notable areas include Mount Gambier, Murray Bridge and the Yorke Peninsula. Legal measures such as electronic monitoring of high-risk offenders and extended restraining orders are also being trialled to enhance victim safety.

Public awareness campaigns are working to help educate the community, while schools are incorporating respectful relationships education to foster long-term cultural change. However, continued focus on prevention, particularly in underserved and vulnerable communities, remains essential to addressing DFSV within the community.

Domestic, family, and sexual violence in South Australia is ongoing, and requires coordinated efforts from the government, police, other organisations and the wider community. There is still much work to be done to ensure the safety and well-being of all South Australians and this submission explains the important role that Crime Stoppers can play.

### **The role of Crime Stoppers South Australia (CSSA)**

Founded in July 1996, CSSA is a community-based organisation and registered charity that is committed to creating safer communities. This is achieved by an array of crime prevention and awareness campaigns, community messaging about unsolved crimes and promoting secure options for anonymous reporting.

The focus of Crime Stoppers is threefold:

- **Anonymous reporting:** To overcome barriers to reporting crime information, Crime Stoppers promotes ways to anonymously share information about unsolved crimes and suspicious behaviour through an online reporting portal and a nationally consistent telephone hotline. By ensuring the safety and anonymity of individuals, the flow of vital information to police and other law enforcement is facilitated, aiding in investigations and in some cases solving crime for the victims. Indeed, the 2022 calendar year demonstrated the digital reporting capability of Crime Stoppers across Australia, with digital contacts far exceeding the number of hotline calls received for the first time.
- **Community empowerment:** Through a range of campaigns, advertising and other engagement initiatives, Crime Stoppers looks to empower individuals and communities. Communities are encouraged to actively participate in crime prevention and reporting by recognising suspicious and criminal behaviour and trusting Crime Stoppers, as an independent organisation, to share what they know anonymously.
- **Crime awareness:** Working collaboratively with police, all levels of government, government departments, community organisations, schools and businesses, Crime Stoppers develops and implements effective crime prevention and education strategies. Initiatives include public awareness and education campaigns, localised programs, online safety awareness and youth-specific programs. By fostering partnerships and promoting community engagement, the aim is to significantly reduce crime rates and ultimately create a safer community.

CSSA is proud to be part of the Crime Stoppers Australia Board, which has a representative from every State and Territory, plus an Assistant Commissioner representing the interests of all Australian Police Commissioners.

Independent research, conducted by Colmar Brunton in early 2020, found 80% of people believe Crime Stoppers continues to play an important role in keeping the community safe, and more than half (63%) said Crime Stoppers delivers campaigns and information that helps to prevent and solve crime. The survey results confirmed very high levels of awareness and trust in Crime Stoppers, with 71% saying it is a trustworthy service to the community.

The anonymity option through Crime Stoppers provides a unique information-gathering opportunity on behalf of police because it actively encourages information from people who may not normally interact with police but are prepared to share what they know with Crime Stoppers, often under condition of anonymity.

As shown in the image below, as developed by [Crime Stoppers Australia](#), Crime Stoppers' impact spans the entire crime prevention spectrum, making it the only not-for-profit organisation with such a comprehensive reach with one contact across Australia every minute.

Other results at a national level include about 80 apprehensions by police every week, with the results leaving to crime prevention and disruption activities creating a safer community for us all.

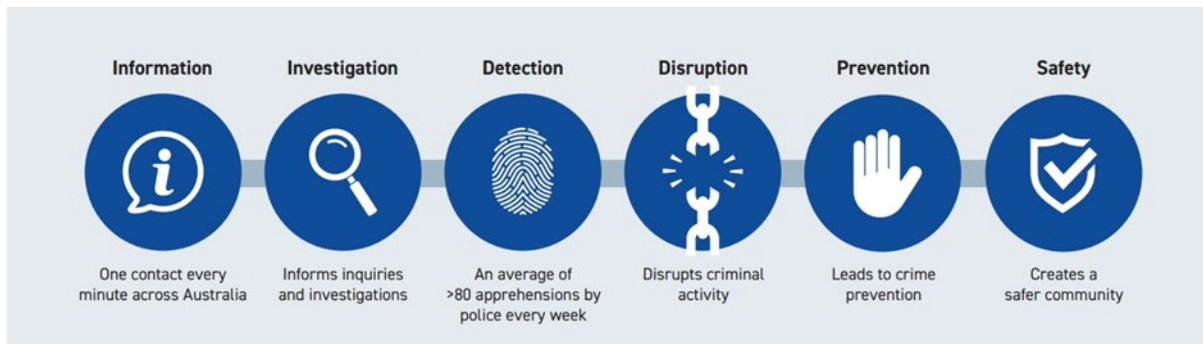


Figure 1: Crime Stopper Australia results etc

From a local perspective, tips to Crime Stoppers SA are 2.6 contacts every hour about a range of unsolved crimes and suspicious behaviour, with an average of 6 apprehensions by SA Police every week directly as a result of information received.

## Operations

Registered as a charity with the [Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission](#), CSSA operates independently as a community-based organisation, encouraging the public to share information about unsolved crimes and suspicious activity, while offering the option to remain anonymous.

CSSA has a standalone, [secure web-based reporting portal](#) developed as part of its partnership with the DEW, which allows the community to conveniently share information about a range of wildlife and environmental crimes. That information is then shared with DEW investigators and other law enforcement as required. The portal can be easily and rapidly expanded to securely collect information from the community on behalf of other government agencies, departments and other appropriate entities as required.

## Information gathering role (SAPOL)

CSSA plays an important role in contributing to SA Police's intelligence holdings. It bridges the gap between the community and police by enabling people to report critical information anonymously that they might otherwise hesitate to share. Reasons for withholding information from police can include past negative experiences, cultural barriers that lead to mistrust or a preference for anonymity.

CSSA's success is built on strong community partnerships, a proven track record and a foundation of trust. People who provide tips can opt to stay anonymous, avoiding any involvement in the investigative process or potential legal proceedings that may follow.

Community members can submit tips via a dedicated phone line, or an online reporting portal accessed via the CSSA website, with no obligation to provide any details as to who they are or how they came to know the information they want to share.

Since its launch in 1996, annual statistics provided by SA Police confirms that information shared with CSSA has directly supported SA Police to make more than 23,000 arrests and solve over 36,000 cases. In the [2023 calendar year](#), CSSA received 17,958 phone calls and 8,635

online tips, leading to 309 arrests and 663 charges for a range of offences, including murder, illicit firearms, drug manufacturing and selling, armed robbery, serious assaults and property offences.

### **Community engagement focus**

CSSA collaborates with the South Australian Government and departments, the Federal Government (via CSA), SA Police, and other stakeholders to run various community education and crime-solving campaigns. These campaigns cover a range of issues, including environmental crimes, unsolved homicides, illegal firearms, bushfire arson, theft, and the production and distribution of illicit drugs.

CSSA's longstanding relationship with South Australia's media outlets - across television, radio, print, digital and outdoor advertising - significantly extends the reach of community campaigns. Many of these media partners provide their support on a pro bono or heavily discounted basis, allowing CSSA to achieve significant advertising exposure.

### **Engaging Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities**

Recognising the challenges that cultural and language barriers can create, CSSA is committed to breaking down these obstacles and fostering a safer community for all South Australians through a CALD engagement strategy. A key part of this effort is engaging with cultural leaders and groups to promote crime prevention messages and awareness of Crime Stoppers within CALD communities.

To support this initiative, CSSA undertakes CALD-specific community engagement activities and ensures its website platform is accessible to people from diverse linguistic backgrounds. This ongoing commitment strengthens CSSA's ability to gather valuable information and work towards a safer community for all South Australians.

### **The role of third-party bystanders**

The current state-wide response to domestic and family violence is a broad fabric comprised of many different threads, ie; prevention, intervention, victim support and perpetrator accountability.

As a community-based organisation focused on encouraging information flows from the community to help police prevent, solve and detect crime, CSSA has a strong focus on motivating third-party bystanders to anonymously share what they know. There is no doubt that Crime Stoppers involvement can enhance the prevention, intervention and perpetrator accountability aspects of the state's family violence response.

In all of its activities, CSSA promotes and supports the need for the community to contact the 000-emergency telephone number if a life-threatening incident or crime is happening and to call 131 444 for non-urgent police assistance.

In contrast, CSSA entirely focusses its community engagement messaging on the provision of non-immediate information, either before or after a crime has occurred.

CSSA remains of the view that the current mechanisms for motivating and activating third-party bystanders to share non-immediate family violence information in South Australia can be strengthened and more highly promoted.

Whilst a reasonable person might assume that any information about a crime should be reported to police in the first instance, it has been CSSA's experience over 28 years of operation that people don't always report what they know directly to police for a variety of reasons including:

- fear of reprisal, if a perpetrator becomes aware that a bystander has provided incriminating information;
- fear of having to be involved in any ensuing police investigation or court processes; and
- cultural distrust of authorities, and/or disbelief that making a report will achieve anything.

CSSA successfully fills this void to ensure that information which may not otherwise be provided, actually makes its way to police. Due to the close proximity of many third-party bystanders to victims and perpetrators of family violence, the above fears and distrust are no doubt heightened. This increases the urgent need to promote Crime Stoppers, as a trusted, anonymous information-gathering option in the domestic and family violence space.

Engagement of third-party bystanders is an integral component in a whole-of-community response to family violence, because it shifts the focus of prevention and intervention responsibilities from purely being a perpetrator/victim dynamic to the broader community.

Third-party bystander actions and interventions can take a plethora of different forms and can occur at any point in a domestic and family violence situation: before the violence starts, once the violence has begun, or after the violence has taken place.

Sharing what they know is a direct and powerful form of third-party bystander intervention. Bystander information reports can serve as the eyes and ears of police and other authorities and provide crucial information that would otherwise go unrecorded. Third-party bystander reporting can be immediate or non-immediate.

However, by reporting non-immediate threats and other key pieces of information about what they know anonymously through Crime Stoppers, third-party bystanders can help build a clearer picture of potential and ongoing violence situations, assist police to intervene in potential or escalating situations, and help bring perpetrators to account.

The importance of bystander reporting was [noted in the coroner's finding](#) into the death of Nicole Joy Millar dated 12 January 2015, handed down by then Victorian State Coroner Ian Gray. In his comments, Chief Coroner Gray noted:

- *“Information provided by family, friends, neighbours and work colleagues may also help authorities detect and prevent new and recurring family violence incidents, identify hidden perpetrators, and provide the missing pieces of the bystander mobilisation picture required to bring perpetrators to account, if they have a safe and certain avenue for providing information.”*
- *“...the circumstances surrounding (the) death and many others indicate that families, friends, colleagues and neighbours need an effective mechanism to bring suspected family*

*violence to the attention of an authority empowered and equipped to respond in a timely manner.”*

- *“Noting that Crime Stoppers is a recognised brand and has accountability mechanisms, I consider that it has the potential to fill the gap between public awareness campaigns and emergency services with respect to family violence”.*

Indeed, Recommendation 29 in the [Response to Issues Paper from the Coroners Court of Victoria](#) saw the coroner specifically recommend Victoria Police and Crime Stoppers expand an existing call to action campaign to include family violence, with the recommendation stating:

*“In the Pursuant to section 72(2) of the Coroners Act 2008, I make the following recommendation connected with the death:*

*Crime Stoppers has developed the Say Something campaign, which urges young people who witness acts of violence to be brave and look out for their friends by reporting incidents of violence confidentially. A website and iPhone app are available to help empower young people to report crime easily and online without identifying themselves. I therefore recommend that Victoria Police, together with Crime Stoppers, conduct a trial extending the Say Something campaign to family violence.”*

The subsequent 2016 Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence focused on creating a systemic response to family violence and (indirectly) recognised the important role of bystanders in its broader prevention and intervention strategies. The recommendations that arguably included the role of bystanders were in the need for public education campaigns (Recommendation 187), the creation of Respect Victoria (Recommendation 188) to foster cultural change and community responsibility, and training initiatives (Recommendation 93) to equip people with the knowledge to safely intervene.

The [Victorian Government's announcement](#) on 28 January 2023 confirmed the implementation of all 227 recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence. While there was no specific recommendation to the role of third-party bystanders, the overall framework encouraged broader community involvement and prevention measures, which aligns with the idea of encouraging community members to play a role in preventing, recognising and addressing violence in a broader sense.

While SAPOL already receives information via CSSA about family and domestic violence matters (which is then forwarded to SAPOL Family Violence sections for investigation) the current approach does not proactively encourage third-party bystanders to anonymously share non-immediate family violence information through Crime Stoppers.

Indeed, it is noted that:

- There is no specific Family/Domestic Violence category for selection on the SAPOL-managed Report Suspicious Behaviour reporting portal on the CSSA website,
- A third-party application can be made if someone is concerned about the safety of another using the [Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme](#) (DVDS), but requires proof of identity as part of the reporting process.

## **Community call to action**

While CSSA already receives family and domestic violence information, it is not proactively promoted as an option in calls to action, primarily due to concerns that a time-critical and/or emergency incident that requires an urgent police response may be incorrectly shared through Crime Stoppers' reporting channels.

As part of risk mitigation, calls to the Crime Stoppers hotline are handled by specialised call takers on a 24/7 basis. This allows for quick action should a contact require an immediate police response. In comparison, digital reports are not monitored in real time, which is why a series of prompters has been developed and clear messaging is in place that refers a tipster to 000 or 131 444 should it be an emergency or police assistance is required.

Although there have been numerous campaigns aimed to increase knowledge of supports available for victims, none specifically look to engage third-party bystanders to raise awareness of what to do if anyone has (non-immediate) information to report – including a clear call to action to Crime Stoppers.

Arguably, the public association of the domestic and family violence message with the Crime Stoppers' trusted brand and call to action would underpin the seriousness with which family violence is now being regarded by the government and the community. If this community messaging and call to action was to become widespread, through CSSA's media reach and leverage across South Australia, it would also raise awareness amongst existing and potential offenders of family violence that their actions are likely to be discovered, shared with Crime Stoppers and they are likely to come to the attention of police. It can be argued that this heightened fear of detection in itself has a deterrent, preventative effect.

At present, there are a multitude of independent and government-supported organisations and agencies in operation across South Australia that work to provide much-needed housing support, ancillary assistance, counselling and information services to victims and perpetrators of family violence, partner violence and sexual assault. These services operate in a range of different ways and at different times. Some services operate online, some on the telephone, some face-to-face, and some in a combination of all three.

While these organisations, services and agencies each play a vital role in educating the community about family violence and responding to the needs of family violence victims, their families and perpetrators, they are inherently designed to assist victims and families or to change perpetrators' behaviours.

None appear to be equipped to receive and process non-immediate anonymous information from the community; they may not always be available when a bystander may choose to make a report; they may not provide an adequate level of anonymity protection; and they do not always provide a useful option for people wishing to report non-immediate information about family violence to police (especially for those who do not wish to be involved in any ensuing police investigation or court processes).

## **The proposed solution**

CSSA recognises that domestic and family violence is a complex and multi-faceted issue that continues to evolve and emerge. There is no single solution to the problem, and a whole-of-community and agency response is needed.

Proactively offering the option of anonymous reporting through Crime Stoppers for third-party bystanders would ensure a more robust and inclusive approach to domestic and family violence prevention and intervention. Integration of CSSA will harness its unique capabilities in mobilising community action and providing invaluable information flows to police and in support of the Royal Commission's mandate.

Use of anonymous reporting would comprise of:

- Promotion of Crime Stoppers as a secure way for third party bystanders to anonymously share non-immediate family violence crime information, which can then be passed onto police or another relevant agency for response.
- A comprehensive approach to information gathering and sharing, with a secure online reporting portal available to third-party bystanders 24 hours a day, seven days a week, via web and smart phones.
- An option to include specialised information and translation assistance for bystanders from CALD communities.
- Development of domestic and family violence community education campaigns that promotes a call to action to Crime Stoppers.

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